

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
For the Montana National Register of Historic Places Program and State Antiquities Database

Montana State Historic Preservation Office
Montana Historical Society
PO Box 201202, 1410 8th Ave
Helena, MT 59620-1202

Property Address: **310 W. Front Street**

Historic Address (if applicable): **320 W. Front Street**

City/Town: **Butte**

Site Number: **24 SB 1041**

(An historic district number may also apply.)

County: **Silverbow**

Historic Name: **Safeway**

Original Owner(s): **Safeway Stores**

Current Ownership ☒ Private ☐ Public

Current Property Name: **Safeway**

Owner(s): **Safeway Stores**

Owner Address:

Phone:

Legal Location

PM: **Montana** Township: **3N** Range: **8W**

SW ¼ SW ¼ NE ¼ of Section: **24**

Lot(s): **Unknown**

Block(s): **Unknown**

Addition: **Unknown** Year of Addition: **Unknown**

USGS Quad Name: **Butte South** Year: **1996**

Historic Use: **Retail**

Current Use: **Retail**

Construction Date: **1963** ☐ Estimated ☒ Actual

☒ Original Location ☐ Moved Date Moved:

UTM Reference www.nris.mt.gov/topofinder2

☐ NAD 27 ☒ NAD 83 (preferred)

Zone: **12** Easting: **380961** Northing: **5094964**

National Register of Historic Places

NRHP Listing Date:

Historic District:

NRHP Eligible: ☒ Yes ☐ No

Date of this document: **June 15, 2010**

Form Prepared by: **Diana J. Painter, PhD**

Address: **3518 N. C Street, Spokane, WA 99205**

Daytime Phone: **(707) 364-0697**

MT SHPO USE ONLY

Eligible for NRHP: ☒ yes ☐ no

Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Date: 11/18/2010

Evaluator: Kate Hampton

Comments:

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Property Name: **310 W. Front Street - Safeway**

Site Number: **24 SB 1041**

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

X See Additional Information Page

Architectural Style: **Modern** If Other, specify: **Curtain wall (Marina model)**

Property Type: **Commercial** Specific Property Type: **Grocery store**

Architect: **Unknown** Architectural Firm/City/State:

Builder/Contractor: **Taylor McDonnell** Company/City/State: **Unknown**

Source of Information: **Newspaper**

Location and setting. The Safeway Store at 210 W. Front Street is a one-story retail store with a rectangular footprint. It has a shallow, barrel-vaulted roof with flat-roofed 'wings' to the north and south, along the side facades, and at the back. The building is located south of downtown Butte, on a block bounded by S. Montana Street on the west; W. Front Street on the north; S. Dakota Street on the east; and W. Holland Street on the south. It occupies about one third of the rear (east side) of the block, with parking for the store taking up the middle section. On the front (west side) of the block is a small, free-standing retail store which is currently vacant. In the southeast corner is a large pylon sign for the store, and a drive-through espresso stand.

The surrounding area is occupied by a mix of primarily commercial and industrial land uses in vernacular buildings. To the north, however, is the 1949 Webster-Garfield Elementary School, designed by renowned Montana architect J. G. Link.

The site slopes slightly toward the south side of the lot. There are only two trees on the site. The only relief in the parking area are the large, double cobra head light fixtures.

Materials. The Safeway store on Front Street is constructed of concrete block, with wood trusses on steel columns. Additional materials include molded concrete block and the glass curtain wall on the front façade, which is set within an aluminum frame. The building has a concrete foundation and what appears to be a membrane roof.

Massing and design. The Safeway store on Front Street is designed in the "Marina" style that was prototyped by Safeway in 1959. It central portion of the store consists of a shallow barrel-vault. To each side and the rear are flat "wings." The entire frontage under the arched roof is glass curtain wall, with solid panels at the bottom. The walls of the remainder of the building are plain and molded concrete block masonry.

West façade. The west or front façade of the Safeway building is the curtain wall portion of the building. It has 13 bays. The curtain wall extends from the base of the building to the eaves, under the arched central portion. Eaves are moderate in depth with a high fascia. The windows are aluminum-frame, with narrow mullions. The kickplate is a solid panel about 3'-0" high. The windows are fixed, one-over-one-light plate glass, with the division occurring at the building canopy. There are two doors on the building, one at either end. Both are automatic, double doors with full-height glass. The solid portion of the building, which is concrete block in a stacked bond pattern, occurs to each side of the curtain wall under the flat roof. There are no eaves on this portion of the building. A sidewalk, which is only a few inches above grade, extends along the building frontage. Covering this sidewalk is a flat metal canopy supported by metal posts. A sign with freestanding letters that spells "Safeway" is located at the outer edge of the canopy, centered under the arch. A large Safeway logo in an internally-lit box sign is suspended from the canopy on the south and north sides.

South façade. The south, side façade of the building has a small addition at the rear (east) side of the lot with two internal loading docks. There are otherwise no features on this side of the building, which is concrete block in a stacked bond pattern.

East façade. The rear, east side of the building has no openings. There are two panels here of molded concrete block that break up this façade. The plain concrete blocks are placed in a running bond pattern. The arch of the main portion of the building, which is clad in contemporary corrugated metal, is visible here. The HVAC equipment is mounted on the flat roof.

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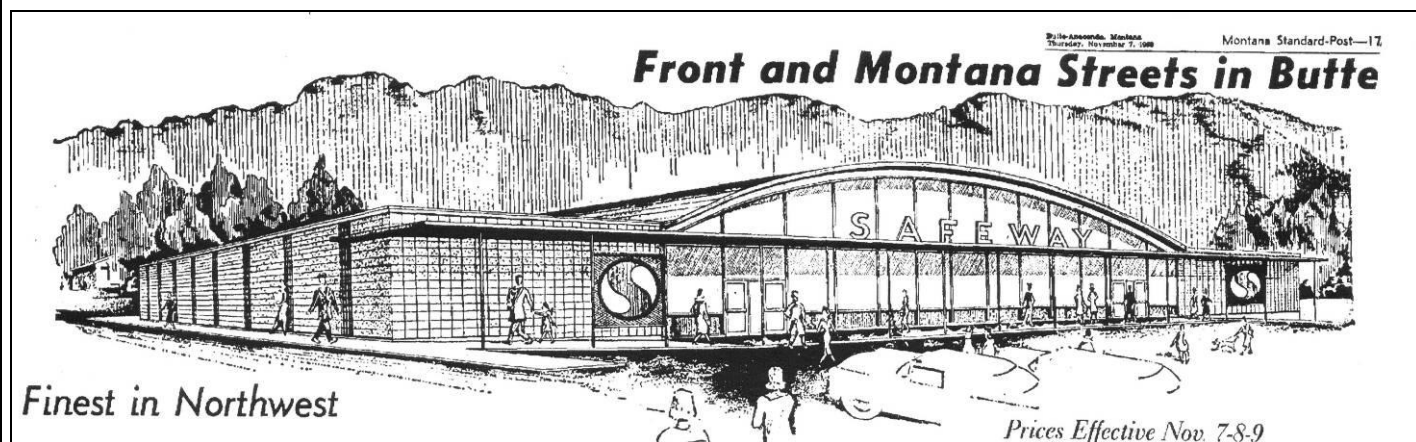
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ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

North façade. The north façade of the building has no openings. Molded concrete brick is laid in a vertical pattern to break up the blank façade. A sign in freestanding letters that spells "Safeway" is mounted on the roof. There are two trees within the sidewalk on this side of the building.

Interiors. The interiors are the most remarkable feature of this building because they have not been remodeled. (The exterior of the building has also not been remodeled, but there are a few Safeway stores in the country that still reflect this original Marina model). It has very plain features and finishes. The steel columns that support the building at the curtain wall and interior beams are unembellished. They terminate in a metal flange that is bolted to the laminated beams. At the curtain wall they sit on a short metal plinth. Within the interior of the store they appear to 'sit' on the linoleum. The laminated beams that support the building's arch and flat portions are clearly visible. Between each beam, extending in straight lines from the front to the rear of the building are the building's bare florescent bulbs. Lower soffits occur in some locations around the building perimeter, indicating small specialty shops within the larger store.



From *The Montana Standard*, November 7, 1963

HISTORY OF PROPERTY

X See Additional Information Page

Safeway in Butte. Safeway stores have a long history in Butte. The Skaggs stores were introduced to Montana in 1924 (*Skaggs Safeway Store in Mayer Block . . . 1933:8*). Samuel Skaggs began his drugstore business in 1915. With his six sons he branched into the grocery business. In 1926 the Skaggs Cash Stores in the Pacific Northwest and northern California merged with the Sam Seelig Stores in Los Angeles (Sam Seelig had sold his 263 stores to Safeway in 1925 (*Longstreth, 2000:111*)). It was through this merger that Safeway stores came into being.

In the late 1920s the store was known as the Skaggs Safeway, which had a motto in Montana of "Distribution without Waste" (*advertisement, The Montana Standard, September 13, 1928, p. 9*).

By the early 1930s the store was known simply as Safeway and there were 50 stores in the state. In 1933 the Safeway in Butte was located in the three-story Mayer Block at Montana and Park Streets.

The number of stores Safeway operated peaked in the mid-1930s. They started an expansion and consolidation, buying out the west coast Piggly Wiggly stores and eventually becoming the second and third largest (at various times) grocery store chain in the United States (*"American Stores Company," <http://www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/American-Stores-Company-Company-History.html>*).

Safeway developed a standardized design for their stores in 1937 that consisted of a small store (typically under 4,000 square feet) with a side lot for parking (*Longstreth, 2000:105*). A period of growth evidently ensued, as Safeway underwent a major expansion in Montana from 1938 to 1942. Montana architect J. G. Link designed two stores in Butte (at West Park and Jackson Streets and East Park and Ohio Streets) in this time frame, as well as stores in Billings, Bozeman, Great Falls, Helena, Lewiston, Sidney, and Sheridan, Wyoming.

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HISTORY OF PROPERTY

There was also a Safeway on Montana at Aluminum Street. Nationally, Safeway operated 2,202 stores and had total sales of \$1.2 billion by 1949 (*A Quick History of the Supermarket*, <http://www.groceteria.com/>).

The first Safeway Store on Front Street was built about 1951. It was constructed at the front of the lot, along Montana Avenue. The Front Street store was remodeled (interior) in 1958, but by 1963 Safeway decided to build a whole new store. W. E. Murray, Safeway's division manager in Butte, announced that a new store was in the planning stages in early 1963 ("*Safeway Plans Big New Store*," 1963:1). A building permit was issued on March 8, 1963. The new store was to be constructed on the east side of the lot, and the existing store on the west side of the lot was to remain in place until construction was complete. It would then be demolished and the space used for parking. The new store would nearly double the size of the existing store, at 28,300 square feet, and it was estimated to cost \$350,000. The new store, with a snack bar, a deli, and an in-store bakery, opened September 23, 1963. Demolition of the existing store commenced that same month.

The new store was to be designed in the "marina" style, the first of its type in Butte. The marina style was named after the prototype store with this design, which was constructed in 1959 in the Marina District of San Francisco. The marina-style Safeway had a glass curtain wall front facade with a Safeway sign in free-standing letters mounted on the canopy. There were a few variations on the design scheme, but the most common form had the broadly-arched roof with flat roof 'wings' to each side. The building otherwise had no openings, so all attention was focused on the highly visible interiors and signage. The company opened numerous stores with this design throughout the next decade, including the 1964 Safeway on Massachusetts Avenue between Harvard and Yale in Butte. In the announcement for this store, W. E. Murray noted, "We'll develop a 30,000 square foot super store of the high-arch marina style on the site, similar to the newly constructed store at Front and Montana streets" (*New Safeway Store . . . 1964:1*).

Safeway's profits were at an all-time high in 1963. That year the business had five stores in Butte, at 1821 Harrison, 55 E. Granite, 506 W. Park, 304 E. Park, and 320 W. Front Street. The company also had a major distribution center, and employed 500 people in the city between their stores and warehouse. At that time the company estimated that it had invested \$4,000,000 in new stores in Montana. It had 41 stores in Montana and six in Wyoming, with new stores planned in Livingston, Miles City, Glendive and Missoula.

Today there are two Safeway stores in Butte, the 1963 store on Front Street and the 1964 store at 2500 Massachusetts Avenue. The Massachusetts Avenue store reflects an exterior renovation that became popular around the 1990s.

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HISTORY OF PROPERTY

Modern supermarkets. What we now know as supermarkets got their start when self-service shopping was introduced to the American consumer. This concept has been credited to the Piggly Wiggly markets, established in Memphis in 1916. Chain stores, which would eventually dominate American food retailing, were introduced in the 1920s. In 1930 the King Kullen store, which was located in a warehouse on the outskirts of New York, was established. This could be regarded as the first 'suburban' supermarket. The number of small grocery stores in the United States peaked in the mid-1930s. As the decade wore on consolidations of smaller stores and their replacement by larger stores created a sharp decline in the number of grocery stores in the country (*A Quick History of the Supermarket*, <http://www.groceteria.co>).

Locating in areas that could be easily accessed by car and that could provide ample parking became a phenomenon in the 1940s. This suburban store called for a whole new way of presenting the building, the merchandise, the signage; in essence all aspects of retailing. The selling points of the new supermarket were space, convenience, and a large selection of merchandise made possible by modern equipment, which in turn made for good prices. Another phenomenon of the 1940s was that many markets turned to consumer goods to fill their shelves, as rationing during World War II limited the amount of certain food products that could be sold. Safeway was a leader in the trend to supply a diversity of goods (*Painter, 2002:11*).

In the 1950s supermarkets began to migrate to suburban areas, following their clientele and inexpensive land. At the same time, new modern store models were developed to attract customers. Historian David Gwynn describes the 1950s as "the era of America's classic gleaming bright supermarket, with white walls, fluorescent lighting, and lots of glass" (*A Quick History of the Supermarket*, <http://www.groceteria.com/>). In the 1950s and early 1960s Safeway developed the easily recognizable, prototypical design with three variations that were built not only throughout the country, but also internationally. This prototype was the "marina" store. The real marina store in San Francisco is still extant and reflects its historical design features.

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Photograph of Marine Safeway prototype store in San Francisco

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

NRHP Listing Date:

NRHP Eligibility: ☒ Yes ☐ No ☒ Individually ☐ Contributing to Historic District ☐ Noncontributing to Historic District

NRHP Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

Area of Significance: **Architecture** Period of Significance: **1963**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

☐ See Additional Information Page

The Safeway store on Front Street in Butte is significant as the first and only remaining Safeway store in Butte designed in the "marina" style, a style introduced by Safeway in 1959 and seen at mid-century in Safeway stores throughout the country and internationally. This store represents the design values embraced by Safeway and other major retailers at mid-century, including providing light and transparency in their building frontages to showcase the merchandise, and plenty of parking. In contrast to most Safeway stores designed in this style, this building has excellent design integrity on the exterior and interior. It is a unique structure not only in Butte but likely at the national level.

INTEGRITY

☐ See Additional Information Page

The Safeway store at 310 W. Front Street in Butte retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. It has excellent integrity both on the exterior and the interior.

Other "marina" style Safeway stores are located in Hamilton and Dillon, MT. The Hamilton Store retains good integrity, while the Dillon store has only fair integrity.

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INFORMATION SOURCES/BIBLIOGRAPHY

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MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
PHOTOGRAPHS

Property Name: 310 W. Front Street - Safeway

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Description: **West (front) façade, overview**



Description: **West (front) façade, detail**

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
PHOTOGRAPHS

Property Name: **310 W. Front Street - Safeway**

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Description: **South (side) facade**

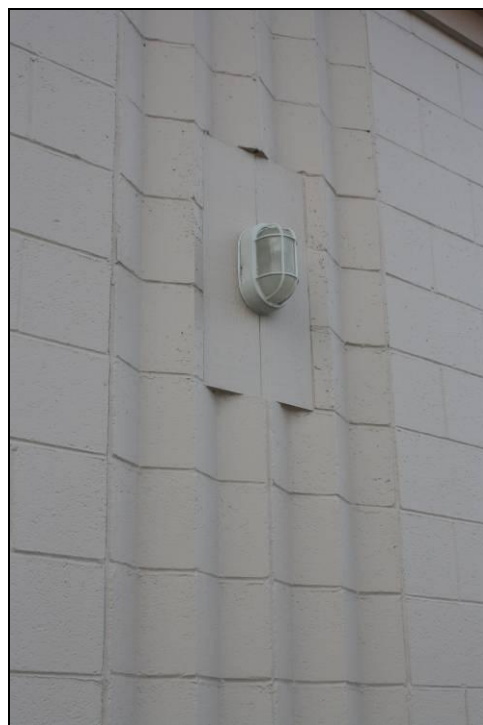


Description: **East (rear) and north (side) facade**

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
PHOTOGRAPHS

Property Name: **310 W. Front Street - Safeway**

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Description: **Signage and building materials detail**



Description: **Front (west) walkway, as viewed from south**

MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
SITE MAP

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MONTANA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD
TOPOGRAPHIC MAP

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